

# SETTING TOLKIEN: EXPLORING MIDDLE-EARTH THROUGH MUSIC COMPOSITION

By

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## Abstract

The poetic texts in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* have provided a wealth of resources to writers and composers since their publishing. Varying in style, character, and idea, these poems and songs offer an inside look of the Middle Earth that Tolkien carefully crafted. Intending to set several of these texts to original music, I studied the life and influences of Tolkien, with the goal of producing a well-developed and thought-out product. My studies covered cultures of both our world and Middle-Earth, including Anglo-Saxon, Finnish, and Welsh. After extensive reading of biographies, analyses, essays, and articles, I developed a cohesive perception of Tolkien's subcreation and chose my texts. With distinctly separate characteristics, my compositions each depict a different culture and approach to music, while displaying my creative choices as a composer.

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### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project was to compose a set of choral art songs based on three of the poems from J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. As I researched the texts, I chose a poem of the Dwarves, of the Hobbits, and of the Elves. Each of the choral pieces has a distinct set of characteristics specific to the historical and cultural components of their respective people group. The development of this project required historical, biographical, cultural, literary, and ethno-musicological research in order to formulate a well-informed and artistically exciting interpretation. However, I was also careful to give full credence to the value of personal imagination and creativity, in hopes that my project would be completely original and authentic to my compositional style and goals.

## Introduction

"In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit (*The Hobbit* 1)." A bored John Ronald Reuel Tolkien wrote this sentence on a lackluster summer day while grading papers as a university professor (Snyder 96). Unbeknownst to him then, that simple sentence would blossom into a fantasy epic that has inspired generations of readers, young and old. The world that J.R.R. Tolkien would craft over the following decades rapidly took on a life of its own, full of wonder, excitement, and adventure. Numerous scholars have devoted their life-work to studying Middle-earth, and yet, there is still a wealth of resources to be discovered and enjoyed.

The study of all things Middle-earth has been my occupation for the past several months. From learning about the life of Tolkien and the worldview with which he created his epic, to studying the cultures he created in all their intricacies, to finding personal connections upon which to contribute my own interpretation of his world, this project has been all encompassing and equally as exciting.

### Method/Procedure

The first step in my process was to research the life of J. R. R. Tolkien, with hopes to establish a better understanding of his experiences and influences. There is no lack of resources concerning his life, but I found Humphrey Carpenter's biographical work, *Tolkien*, especially useful. Christopher Snyder discusses Carpenter's biography, describing it as having "never been surpassed" (Snyder xi). It was through these biographical resources that I began to compile my foundational knowledge of Tolkien, upon which I would later build my own creative work.

Born in South Africa in 1892, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien lived there for only three years before returning to England. His mother, Mabel Suffield, was British; his father, Arthur Tolkien, was of German descent, but the events of World War I and World War II eventually minimized his German pride (Snyder 2). Instead, he strongly identified with his mother's Anglo-Saxon heritage and family, the Suffields, with whom the young family lived in Birmingham upon leaving South Africa (Carpenter 20). Regarding his origins, he once stated, "Though a Tolkien by name, I am a Suffield by tastes, talents, and upbringing...and any corner of that country [Worcesterchire] (however fair or squalid) is in an indefinable way 'home' to me, as no other part of the world is (Carpenter 19)." A large component of this occurred through the untimely death of his father and paternal grandfather, which systematically severed his links with the Tolkien family (Carpenter 18). His self-identification as "Suffield" and interest in his Anglo-Saxon roots would play an important role in the future development of his Middle Earth. Several years were spent in Birmingham, till 1896, when Mabel moved the little family to "the hamlet of Sarehole"

to live independently of her parents (Carpenter 20). Young Tolkien spent four years in that small cottage, a time he later described as "the longest-seeming and most formative part of my life (Carpenter 24)."

During his childhood, Tolkien's mother had nurtured a love of language in him by teaching him foreign languages early on (Snyder 15). Humphrey Carpenter discusses these lessons:

"Early in his Sarehole days his mother introduced him to the rudiments of Latin, and this delighted him. He was just as interested in the sounds and shapes of the words as in their meanings, and she began to realise that he had a special aptitude for language. She began to teach him French. He liked this much less, not for any particular reason; but the sounds did not please him as much as the sounds of Latin and English. She also tried to interest him in playing the piano, but without success. It seemed rather as if words took the place of music for him, and that he enjoyed listening to them, reading them, and reciting them, almost regardless of what they meant (22)."

This instruction sparked Tolkien's renowned fascination with languages, which quickly became evident during his studies at King Edward's School in Birmingham, where he "became attracted to Old English and Gothic," along with Greek and Latin (Snyder 4). One of his instructors at King Edward's was a medievalist who encouraged his pupils to "use the plain old words of the English language...read Chaucer, and...[recite] the *Canturbury Tales*...in the original Middle English," inspiring Tolkien to learn more about the language's history (Carpenter 28). Around this time, Tolkien first

read the great epic poem, *Beowulf*, in Old English, which marked the beginning of a lifetime of extensive scholarship on the subject (Snyder 16). Following graduation from King Edward's, Tolkien continued his education at Oxford's Exeter College, studying "Literae Humaniores - the honors course in classics, philosophy, and ancient history...[also including] classical history and philosophy in the original Greek and Latin (Snyder 6)." During this time, Tolkien decided to specialize in comparative philology. Philology, according to Merriam-Webster, is "the study of literature and of disciplines relevant to literature or to language as used in literature; linguistics, especially historical and comparative linguistics; the study of human speech especially as the vehicle of literature and as a field of study that sheds light on cultural history." At that time in the nineteenth century, philology was a highly-esteemed field; now, however, it is largely extinct, having been succeeded by historical comparative linguistics (Snyder 7).

His interest in languages perpetually distracted from his classical studies, as he continued learning about Gothic and Middle and Old English. He also additionally began studying Welsh and Finnish, largely due to his first encounter with the Finnish epic, *The Kalevala* (Snyder 6). The impact *The Kalevala* had on Tolkien cannot be overstated, specifically in regard to his language inventing. Although he had invented languages from a young age for play with his brother and cousins, his first attempts at constructing what he referred to as a "Gnomish language" was based off of his Finnish studies (Snyder 8, 15). This language would eventually become "Quenya," or High-elven in his fantasy stories (Carpenter 9). His growing fascination with mythology was also closely knit to the Finnish text. Tolkien was aware that England, at one time, had possessed its own threads



of mythology, but they had been lost to time and foreign influence (Wainwright 14).

Through his studies of the mythologies of other cultures, he began to desire a similar epic for his people (Carpenter 59).

Tolkien's studies at Oxford were unhappily interrupted by the battle cries of World War I. Although he did end up joining the British armed forces, the decision was a difficult one (Snyder 7). At this point in his life, he was still enthusiastic about his German ancestry and had added Germanic languages to his many areas of study (Snyder 7). However, his time in the trenches of France turned out to be a formative time for the still-blossoming author, as writing poetry became his pastime and companion. During this time, Tolkien wrote his first poem containing essences of Middle Earth, "The Voyage of Éarendel the Evening Star." This writing was inspired by several lines from an Old English poem composed by Anglo-Saxon poet Cynewulf in the eighth or ninth century, titled *Crist II*. The inspirational lines read (in Old English) "Eala Earendel! engla beorhast ofer middengeard monnum sende," which says "Hail Earendel, brightest of angels, over Middle-earth sent to men" when translated into modern English (Snyder 8). According to preeminent Tolkien scholar, Tom Shippey, this poem "[was] the catalyst for Tolkien's 'subcreation' of Middle-earth" (Snyder 8). Christopher Snyder discusses the importance of this poem in his book, *The Making of Middle-earth*:

"From here on, he [Tolkien] would focus his vague ideas about fairies and goblins into a cohesive universe of related tales, imbued with that same Northern spirit captured by Cynewulf, who had given Tolkien a name begging for explanation. Éarendel the Mariner would become the first hero of Middle-earth, and around his

story would grow the great legendarium of which *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* are only a part. But in September 1914, the seed of these great works was a poem - a brief forty-eight lines of verse...to which he gave the Old English title 'Scipfæreld Éarendeles Áfensteorran'... (8)."

In his book, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, Shippey states that he "remain[s] convinced that Tolkien cannot be properly discussed without some considerable awareness of the ancient works and the ancient world that he tried to revive (Shippey xxvii)." Similarly, Snyder asserts that "the tremendous impact of ancient and medieval cultures upon Tolkien's 'subcreation' [the word Tolkien used to describe "inventing an imaginary secondary world" (Snyder 8)] cannot be dismissed (Snyder 38)."

Upon completing my research on Tolkien's life and writings, my next step was to begin to develop a more complete personal knowledge of his people groups as I endeavored to choose my texts to set. By systematically studying and learning about each society, I was able to just that. I have included all three of my compositions in Appendix A.

The culture that seemed most common and accessible personally was that of the Hobbits. Clearly modeled after the people of Great Britain, the Shire-folk were closest to Tolkien's own youthful experiences of "simple folk by choice," with "insatiable appetites...apparently dour [and yet] keen on singing, dancing, games, and pastimes...[enjoying] word-games, gifts, and hospitality" (Wainwright 56). While Tolkien understood the word "hobbit" to be "a derivative of Old English *hol-bytla*, meaning 'hole-dweller,'" despite the fact that the word already existed rarely to mean

"goblin" or "brownie" (Wainwright 55). While many authors have discussed the characteristics of Hobbits and their culture, I have found that looking directly at the source can provide a wealth of knowledge:

"And what is a Hobbit? Hobbits are little people, smaller than dwarfs. They love peace and quiet and good tilled earth. They dislike machines, but are handy with tools. They are nimble, but don't like to hurry. They have sharp ears and eyes. They are inclined to be fat. They wear bright colors but seldom wear shoes. They like to laugh and eat (six meals a day) and drink. They like parties and they like to give and receive presents" (*The Hobbit* i).

In a letter to an acquaintance, Tolkien described himself as "a hobbit in all but size...I smoke a pipe, [and] have a very simple sense of humor...I do not travel much (Stanton 22)." Simple-minded, unadventurous, unimaginative, easily pleased and entertained, Hobbits were comfortable in the Shire and needed nothing more; for them, "the Shire [was] the world (Stanton 22)."

As with all of my texts, I intentionally looked for poems that were described in the books as being indigenous to a culture. My concern was related to cultural impact that seems to be displayed in many of the songs and poems composed by Bilbo and later, Frodo and Sam. As a composer, I am aware of the important role that personal experiences play when creating any kind of artistic product. For me, the adventures of the Hobbits allowed for the potential of a less authentically-Hobbit product. With this in mind, the text that I ended up choosing is from *The Fellowship of the Ring*, prior to much

of the Hobbits' future adventures. It is described as a bath song, and the text goes as follows:

Sing hey! for the bath at close of day  
that washes the weary mud away!  
A loon is he that will not sing:  
O! Water Hot is a noble thing!  
O! Sweet is the sound of falling rain,  
and the brook that leaps from hill to plain;  
but better than rain or rippling streams  
is Water Hot that smokes and steams.  
O! Water cold we may pour at need  
down a thirsty throat and be glad indeed;  
but better is Beer if drink we lack,  
and Water Hot poured down the back.  
O! Water is fair that leaps on high  
in a fountain white beneath the sky;  
but never did fountain sound so sweet  
as splashing Hot Water with my feet!

As I indicated in my proposal, I have been intentional to avoid listening and studying other musical interpretations of Tolkien's texts in order to prevent an inordinate influence on my compositions. Originally I had intended to set the texts into an art song

format, with solo singer and instrumentation. However, as I progressed in the project, I decided instead to set the texts as choral pieces. I felt this was especially suitable for this Hobbit song, as Hobbit culture is over all very communal and group-oriented. In his article, "Making Texts Audible: A Workshop Report on Setting Tolkien to Music," Fabian Geier briefly describes his perception of Hobbit music:

"The Hobbits...seem to have an affinity for cheerful, simple melodies. One should be able to learn them without great effort, and they should have "hookline" characteristics to stimulate people to sing along. The task, therefore, is to write quasi-folksongs (*Music in Middle-earth*, 285)."

My own conclusions regarding the characteristics of Hobbit music closely mirror his, and so I purposed to write a piece for SATB that would be simple, upbeat, and enjoyable to sing and listen to. I also worked to craft a melody that would flow easily and follow the natural rhythm of Tolkien's words, without developing an ill-fitting complexity. As a composer, I usually try to avoid a large amount of repetition; however, in this case, I made an exception. As is common with folksongs, much of the appeal is in the sing-ability of the melody and the capability of others to learn it quickly and join in. With this in mind, I decided to utilize a strophic form, using the same basic melody for each verse and similar accompanying figurations within the different voices. In regards to instrumentation, I simplified my original ideas greatly, deciding to use only a flute to fill out the harmonies, as it seemed more fitting contextually than a more complex orchestration.

The challenge with a strophic setting is simply that it can become too simple and even boring. Tolkien's text has little variation in rhythm and meter, which can contribute to this problem if only utilizing the original text verbatim. In order to combat this potentiality, I added a short section in the middle, in which the singers get momentarily caught up in their excitement regarding a pint of beer. Harmonically, the lines veer away from the tonic C major into a metaphorical rabbit trail of the dominant key area of G major, aligning with their characteristic limited adventurousness. This portion lasts only a brief four measures, but effectively adds an additional layer of both variety and comedy.

I also wanted to capture the atmosphere in which a song like this would have been sung. As is my experience with folk music, when a group of people gathers, there are often a number of participants who whistle, hum, or sing portions of the verses instead of the entirety of the piece. The challenge presented by this is that the originality of these types of participatory components can be lost when specifically notated in the score. To avoid this occurrence, I included written instructions for performers to improvise humming or whistling at certain sections of the piece. This component also served to add variety, as previously discussed.

The concept of improvisation has been a reoccurring thought throughout my previous semesters of personal composition study. Throughout the texts of the *Lord of the Rings*, readers frequently encounter impromptu poems and songs, which support my conclusions to incorporate that component into my setting. One of the challenges I have faced with including improvisatory components in my pieces, however, is the issue of a performer's interpretation differing so widely from my own, as the composer, that it

drastically alters my goal for the piece. However, in this situation, I am confident that my inclusion of improvisational material will be subtle enough so as to not distract from the primary idea, but will still contribute positively to achieve a cohesive musical experience.

The next people group that I decided to tackle was that of the Dwarves. While Tolkien provides the story of the creation of the Dwarves in *The Silmarillion*, he does not devote much time to discussion of Dwarf lifestyle and culture in his mythology. However, much can be gleaned by a close reading of Tolkien's texts and also by looking at his sources.

In discussing his Dwarves, Tolkien explained:

"The 'dwarves' of my legends are far nearer to the dwarfs of Germanic [legends] than are the Elves [of traditional European folklore] but still...different from them...they are not really Germanic 'dwarfs' and I call them 'dwarves' to mark that (Stanton 107)."

Despite his assertion that his Dwarves are not entirely akin to the traditional English and Norse mythologies, they are also not entirely different. Many of the names given to the Dwarves by Tolkien were pulled directly from Norse mythology. As in most traditional models, Tolkien's Dwarves are highly skilled in mining and metal work, their abilities extending to little else. Notoriously stubborn-headed and irritable, Dwarves historically maintained a careful distance between the affairs of Elves and Men. Much of their practices remain a mystery, largely due to their subterranean existence and secretive language (Wainwright 40).

With these characteristics in mind, I worked to choose my text, settling on the

song sang by Gimli while in Moria in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Dwarf songs and poems tend to be few and far between in, but the historicity and narrative nature of this poem especially drew me to it. Referred to as "Durin's Song" or "In Moria, In Khazad-dum," the entire text reads:

The world was young, the mountains  
green,  
No stain yet on the Moon was seen,  
No words were laid on stream or stone  
When Durin woke and walked alone.

He named the nameless hills and dells;  
He drank from yet untasted wells;  
He stooped and looked in Mirrormere,  
And saw a crown of stars appear,  
As gems upon a silver thread,  
Above the shadows of his head.

The world was fair, the mountains tall,  
In Elder Days before the fall  
Of mighty kings in Nargothrond  
And Gondolin, who now beyond  
The Western Seas have passed away:  
The world was fair in Durin's Day.

A king he was on carven throne  
In many-pillared halls of stone  
With golden roof and silver floor,  
And runes of power upon the door.

The light of sun and star and moon  
In shining lamps of crystal hewn  
Undimmed by cloud or shade of night  
There shone forever fair and bright.

There hammer on the anvil smote,  
There chisel clove, and graver wrote;  
There forged was blade, and bound was  
hilt;  
The delver mined, the mason built.  
There beryl, pearl, and opal pale,  
And metal wrought like fishes' mail,  
Buckler and corslet, axe and sword,  
And shining spears were laid in hoard.

Unwearied then were Durin's folk;  
Beneath the mountains music woke:  
The harpers harped, the minstrels sang,  
And at the gates the trumpets rang.

The world is grey, the mountains old,  
The forge's fire is ashen-cold;  
No harp is wrung, no hammer falls:  
The darkness dwells in Durin's halls;



The shadow lies upon his tomb  
 In Moria, in Khazad-dûm.  
 But still the sunken stars appear

In dark and windless Mirrormere;  
 There lies his crown in water deep,  
 Till Durin wakes again from sleep.

Out of the three poems, this text was the most challenging for me to work with. The ambiguous and secretive nature of Dwarf culture presented both unique challenges in that I had fewer guidelines upon which to build my piece, but it also allowed for more personal creative license. This ambiguity made it a challenge to determine the dominant cultural influence, leaving my mind cluttered with everything from the comedic dwarves of Disney to the Norwegian spirit of Edvard Grieg's *Lyric Pieces* to the grandeur of Richard Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. Another difficulty became evident in the fear of unintentionally imitating other Dwarf song settings, specifically "Misty Mountains" from the new *The Hobbit* film trilogy. The haunting nature of the melody and character of that piece has become an influential piece of the interpretation of Dwarf music and separating my creative process from it seemed daunting. However, I came to the realization that an external influence is not always negative and that it is through varied external influences that artists are able develop their own individual styles. While I still intentionally worked to produce an original composition, I focused on composing accurately to my ideas, and myself, rather than over-actively avoiding certain "familiar" sounds and ideas.

Much of my preparation consisted of reading and re-reading the text both separately and in context, hoping to gain an accurate understanding of the spirit of the piece for myself. Unlike the music of the Elves, little is said in way of description regarding the nature of Gimli's ballad. Tolkien writes that "he [Gimli] rose and standing

in the dark began to chant in a deep voice while the echoes ran away into the roof (*Fellowship* 354)" and after, "having sung his song, [Gimli] would say no more (356)."

During my brainstorming process, I was struck by the similar spirit and character that this piece has to the Finnish *Kalevala*. As this work was a key inspiration to Tolkien, I spent much time researching and listening to readings of various kinds. I was intrigued by the narrative nature of the poem, which reminded me of different types of oral traditions by which cultures have passed down their histories. Tolkien's choice to describe Gimli's words as "chant" also influenced my conclusions (*Fellowship* 354). For these reasons, I eventually decided to organize my piece in a manner that aligned with these key points combined - by allowing for a majority of the text to be spoken rather than sung.

One noticeable change that I made in my setting of the text is the intentional exclusion of a number of verses from the original text. I made this decision after careful thought regarding the cohesiveness of the entire set of pieces. While I wanted each piece to be distinct and different, I also worked to provide a sense of unity between the three. Due to the varying characteristics of each piece, the only component I could vary and actively control is length of pieces. Compared to the other two texts I chose, "Durin's Song" is notably longer. After much consideration, I chose four stanzas to combine into my setting.

While this piece would technically be considered a choral piece, I intentionally worked to formulate it as a sort of hybrid with the art song. Arranged for ATB, I have all of the text in a solo bass voice, except for a short section in the middle. The

accompanying vocals are composed of predominantly long, held tones, functioning as an ever-shifting and undulating, yet grounded, drone. I decided to only include male voices and low female voices, to represent the low voice with which Gimli sang and the rarity of female Dwarves (Wainwright 40). Again, my instrumentation is simple, with only tubular bells to accompany the voice parts. Simplicity was my goal with this piece, as the Dwarves' skills do not lie in the performing arts. The value of their music rests in the function of the texts - for telling their stories, uniting their people, and providing hope for future generations.

Lastly, I faced the challenge of understanding and translating the ethereal qualities of Elven culture. The "first-born of Tolkien's imagination," Elves were "an idealized and elevated version of Men" (Stanton 100-101); Tolkien himself explained that "they really represent Men with greatly enhanced aesthetic and creative faculties, greater beauty and longer life, and nobility...(Stanton 99)." In his book, *Tolkien's Mythology for England*, Edmund Wainwright describes Tolkien's Elves:

"The Elves in *The Lord of the Rings* are Tolkien's attempt to put these beings back where they belong: at the heart of English myth and legend. In Germanic lore, Elves are shining creatures of immense beauty. Tolkien's Elves were taller than Men and graceful, with dark hair and grey eyes, except for the fair-haired 'golden house of Finrod'. While the Elves of Middle-Earth were powerful and well-intentioned, they were also aloof, dispassionate and suspicious. The Elves were associated most strongly with weaving and carving - 'feminine' skills against the mining and metalworking of the Dwarves. They had a long tradition of poetry,

literature, and story-telling...The whiteness of the Elves, their inner luminescence, is also an ancient motif. The word 'Elf' (Old English *ælf*) means 'brilliant, white, shining' (43)."

An innate quality that Tolkien imbued into his Elves is the gift of music.

Throughout his books, Elves and music are found united as one. The task of composing music to accompany Elven texts is fearsome and seems foolhardy to some, as their music is "explicitly said [to be] superior to all that humans can make in aesthetic regard (*Music in Middle-earth* 286)." Tolkien's extensive descriptions of Elven music create an even more monumental task. The following passage is one of many that can be found throughout his books.

"At first the beauty of the melodies and of the interwoven words in elven-tongues, even though he [Frodo] understood them little, held him in a spell, as soon as he began to attend to them. Almost it seemed that the words took shape, and visions of far lands and bright things that he had never yet imagined opened out before him; and the firelit hall became like a golden mist above seas of foam that sighed upon the margins of the world. Then the enchantment became more and more dreamlike, until he felt that an endless river of swelling gold and silver was flowing over him, too multitudinous for its pattern to be comprehended; it became part of the throbbing air about him, and it drenched and drowned him. Swiftly he sank under its shining weight into a deep realm of sleep (*Fellowship* 261)."

Modern composers can only wish for the mesmerizing qualities innate in Elven music.

The task becomes, then, to determine how to best represent that magical music in human terms.

In order to find any sort of hope to compose appropriately, I first spent time reading various poems and songs; along with this, I studied Tolkien's own interpretation of Elven music. Tolkien collaborated with Donald Swann as he composed the first authorized setting of Tolkien's poems, "The Road Goes Ever On," specifically on Swann's setting of the Elven poem "Namárië". Disliking Swann's original interpretation, Tolkien instead provided a melody with the distinct characteristics of Gregorian chant, the standard liturgical music of the Catholic Church (*Middle-earth Minstrel* 143).

Although still feeling unqualified, I began the search for my text, hoping that connecting to Tolkien's words would provide the needed inspiration. I found myself drawn to the "Hymn to Elbereth Gilthoniel," which is encountered by the Hobbits on several different occasions throughout *The Lord of the Rings*.

Snow-white! Snow-white! O Lady clear!

O Queen beyond the Western Seas!

O Light to us that wander here

Amid the world of woven trees!

Gilthoniel! O Elbereth!

Clear are thy eyes and bright thy breath!

Snow-white! Snow-white! We sing to thee

In a far land beyond the Sea.

O stars that in the Sunless Year

With shining hand by her were sown,

In windy fields now bright and clear  
We see your silver blossom blown!

O Elbereth! Gilthoniel!  
We still remember, we who dwell  
In this far land beneath the trees,  
Thy starlight on the Western Seas.

The hymn is written in adoration of Varda, the Lady of the Stars, whom the Elves call Elbereth and love above all the godlike Valar - the Holy Ones discussed in *The Silmarillion* (Snyder 180). While some interpret this song as a "sad walking song," my perception is slightly different. Looking at context, Tolkien introduces the song with High Elves walking near the traveling Hobbits. The group has a conversation with one of the Elves, Gildor, immediately afterwards, in which he laughs and his entire company is cheerful and friendly (*Fellowship* 89). Along with this, the Lady Elbereth is dearly loved by the Elves and associated with light, power and joy (Snyder 180). For these reasons, I perceive a greater depth of meaning and spirit than simply "sad"; the Hymn to Elbereth is a song of light, adoration, and beauty, and yet, it is tinged with strains of melancholy longing for a time quickly passing away.

Once I had worked through these perplexities, I began writing my arrangement. Writing for SAT voices, I decided to include only high voices, in order to emphasize the "feminine" characteristics of Elven culture and song. While I kept Tolkien's ideas regarding Elven music in mind, I did not restrict myself from expressing myself creatively. After much thought, I felt that the piece would be most effective *a cappella*, in hopes that the interwoven vocal lines would be heard more clearly. For this piece, I paid

special attention to the harmonic characteristics, maintaining an overtly tonal sound while incorporating moments of dissonance and resolution. At the end of the piece, I added a short segment of the original Quenya text, returning to a style much more closely resembling the Gregorian chants that Tolkien imagined. While the magical qualities of Elven music are still to be desired, my hope is that I have produced a work that is rich, beautiful, and reminiscent of the sacred past.

### Analysis/Conclusion

As is often the case with creative endeavors, analyzing merit can be challenging. When factoring in personal connection, style, and opinion, much is variable and the potential for differing perceptions is high. However, there are certain areas in which one can evaluate and assess progress and personal development. These areas include the process itself, the product in comparison to the process, and growth as an artist and scholar.

In taking a step back and considering the process by which I accomplished my research and compositions, I believe that I was able to find the balance needed in order to learn the necessary information without overwhelming myself. The general topic that I chose has been thoroughly studied for decades and the amount of resources available to me was seemingly endless. Weeding through books, articles, journals, and essays became tedious work, but I found it necessary for success, as the information that was helpful to me was not always clear from titles and summaries. I was systematic in recording relevant and helpful information, in order to allow for a consistently continuing growth of my personal knowledge base. It was only through this foundation that I was able to write pieces that I felt satisfied my original goals.

In my compositional process, it was also important to establish a balance between informed decisions based on my research, and decisions based on my personal preferences, ideas, and creativity. This is a balance that I have worked to strike in my artistic endeavors prior to this project, but I feel that I was able to have more success in this case than I have in the past. As an artist, it is only through personal creativity that one



can own his or her work, and this is a factor that I did not want to become lost in my search for a Tolkienesque product. Collaboration between research and creativity was necessary, and the outcome of that has been exciting.

As I have already made mention of, my personal development and growth as a composer and scholar has been an important result of this project. The unique challenges presented throughout this project have required me to consider and work through problems and questions that I would not have encountered otherwise. The three choral pieces I composed as a result of my studies were my first taste of choral composition and I look forward to continue working in that medium.

Despite the progress that I feel I have made thus far through working on my Honors Project, I have also grown to have a greater view of both my potential as a composer and scholar, but also for this project as well. The challenging aspect of music composition is that a composer can always polish and hone his or her pieces, which is what I plan to do with my three compositions. I look forward to their performance in April, as much can be learned about compositional techniques, notation, and overall effectiveness from a live performance. I will also have the opportunity to collaborate with a fellow musician who will be working as conductor for the ensemble. Receiving his interpretations and input will be another area of continuing development. Up until that point, I will continue to edit and critique my work, in hopes of producing the most effective and authentic pieces that I can. It is my hope that my work will be considered an informative and scholarly contribution to the Middle-earth so carefully revealed in Tolkien's writings.

### Reflection

The Honors Project process has been the most challenging accomplishment of my college career. Personally, it has required discipline and perseverance, along with the need to push through walls and ruts that I had unintentionally built up and gotten stuck in. Through this project, I learned how to focus my research and find information quickly; I learned how to push through writer's block, both in the writing of my thesis and composing; I had to push through the limitations I have set on myself due to my life-long struggle with perfectionism. One of the challenges of creative projects is the tendency to require "inspiration" and "mood" in order to be productive. Learning how to work despite lack of inspiration, when nothing sounds right, is a hurdle that all successful creators must vault. Through this project I both faced and conquered that problem, establishing a discipline and work ethic that I had previously only admired in others. In all of these areas, I have challenged myself and come out stronger and with more confidence in myself as a writer and composer. Moving forward, I hope to continue to better myself and develop my talents and abilities, with the goal of widening my experiences and setting high expectations for myself.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Compositions

# An Ode to Water Hot

J.R.R. Tolkien

Jessica Spiars

Lively, enthusiastic, lilting (♩ = 180)

Score for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Flute. The tempo is Lively, enthusiastic, lilting (♩ = 180). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. The Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts are currently silent, indicated by whole rests. The Flute part begins with a melody starting on a whole note, followed by eighth notes, and ends with a crescendo.

Score for Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), Bass (B.), and Flute (Fl.). The tempo is Lively, enthusiastic, lilting (♩ = 180). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. The Soprano part begins with a melody starting on a whole note, followed by eighth notes, and ends with a crescendo. The Alto part begins with a melody starting on a whole note, followed by eighth notes, and ends with a crescendo. The Tenor and Bass parts are currently silent, indicated by whole rests. The Flute part begins with a melody starting on a whole note, followed by eighth notes, and ends with a crescendo.

5

*mf*

S. La la la! Sing

*mf*

A. La la la la... Sing

*mf*

T. Sing

*mf*

B. Sing

*mp*

Fl. Sing

9 Improv. humming/whistling

S. hey!

A. hey!

T. 8 hey! for the bath at close of day that wash - es the wear - y

B. *mp*

Fl. hey! La la la la

12

S.

A.

T. 8 mud\_\_ a - way! A\_\_ loon is he that\_\_ will not sing:

B. Ah\_\_ Will not sing:

Fl.

15

S. *mf* O! Wa - ter Hot is a

A. *mf* O! Wa - ter Hot is a

T. *f* O! Wa-ter Hot is a no - ble thing! O! Wa - ter Hot is a

B. *mf* Wa - ter Hot is a

Fl.

18

S. *mp* no - ble thing! Fall - ing—

A. no - ble thing! O! Sweet is the sound of fall - ing rain, and the

T. no - ble thing! Improv. humming/whistling

B. Improv. humming/whistling

Fl. *mp*



21

S. rain! La la la

A. brook that leaps from hill to plain; but bet-ter than rain or

T. 8

B. 8

Fl.

24

S. la la! Smokes and steams!

A. rippl - ing streams is Wa - ter Hot that smokes and steams! O!

T. 8

B. 8

Fl.

27

*mf* Improv. humming/whistling

S. No - ble thing!

A. Wa - ter Hot is a no - ble thing!

T. 8 Sing hey!

B. *mf* O! Wa - ter\_\_\_ cold we may

Fl.

30

*mp*

S.

A. *mp* La la la la la!\_\_\_ La

T. 8 A thirst - y throat! Ah, but,

B. pour at need down a thirst - y\_\_\_throat and be glad in - deed; but

Fl.

## Suddenly growing faster

[illegible]

## Returning to original tempo

36

**Returning to original tempo**

S. *la la la la la la la* *la* *Fa la la la la!*

A. *la Fa la la la* *la la la la la* *la la!*

T. *beer! Oh, beer! Beer! Drink we lack!*

B. *Yes, a pint of beer! Bet-ter is Beer! if drink we lack, and*

Fl.

39

S. *mf* And

A. Down the back!

T. 8 And

B. *f* And

Wa - ter Hot poured down the back! And

Fl. *p*

41

S. *f* Wa - ter Hot poured down the back! O! Wa - ter is fair that

A. *mf* Down the back! O! Wa - ter is fair that

T. 8 Wa - ter Hot poured down the back! Hey!

B. Wa - ter Hot poured down the back! Sing hey!

Fl. *mp*

44

S. leaps on high in a fount - ain white be - neath the sky; but

A. leaps on high A fount - ain white be - neath the sky; but

T. *mf* Leaps on high! La

B. *mf* A fount - ain white! La la

Fl.

47

S. nev - er did fount - ain sound so sweet as splash - ing Hot Wa - ter

A. nev - er did fount - ain sound so sweet as splash - ing Hot Wa - ter

T. *f* la la la la!

B. *f* la! Sound so sweet!

Fl.

50 **Slightly slower to end**

S. *f*  
with my feet! O! Wa - ter Hot is a nob - le thing!

A. *f*  
with my feet! O! Wa - ter Hot is a no - ble thing!

T. *mf* *f*  
With my feet! O! Wa - ter Hot is a no - ble thing!

B. *f*  
Wa - ter Hot is a no - ble thing!

Fl.

# In Moria, In Khazad-dum

J.R.R. Tolkien

Jessica Spiars

**Free, sotto voce**  
♩ = 72

Solo voice, spoken, low pitched, loosely following indicated rhythm;  
with snarl and exaggerated enunciation

Bass

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Tubular Bells

*mp*

*mp*

*mp*

*p*

The world was young, the

Oh

Mm

Ooh

Mm

Mm

Mm

6

Pushing ahead

B.

A.

T.

B.

Tu. Be.

mountains green, no stain yet on the moon was seen, no words were laid

Ooh

Mm

oh

Oh

*p*

B. on stream or stone when Dur - in woke and walked a - lone. —

A. Mm —

T. 8 ooh — Mm — Ooh

B. — Mm — Mm —

Tu. Be.

B. The world was fair, the mountains tall, in Eld -

A. Oh — Ooh — mm —

T. 8 oh — Oh — mm — ooh —

B. Oh — Mm — oh —

Tu. Be. *p*



B. er Days be-fore the fall of might-y kings in Nar-go thrond and Gondo-lin, who now

A. ooh\_ mm\_

T. oh\_ oh\_ oh\_

B. ooh\_ oh\_ ooh\_

Tu. Be. (none)

B. be-yond the West-ern Seas have passed a-way:

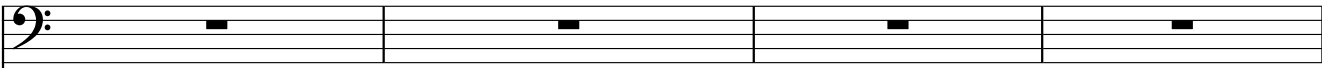
A. ooh\_ oh\_ mm\_ Oh\_ oh\_

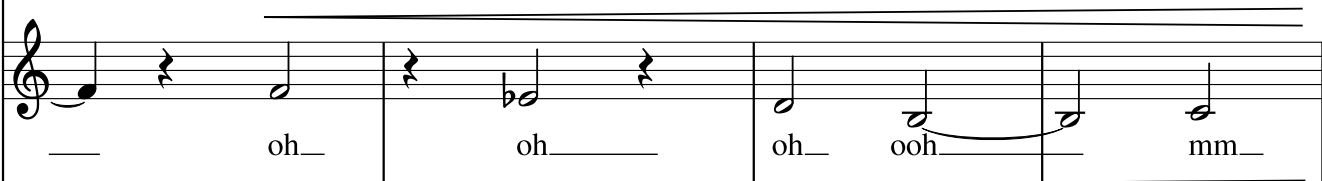
T. mm\_ Ooh\_ ooh\_


B. oh\_ mm\_ Mm\_ mm\_

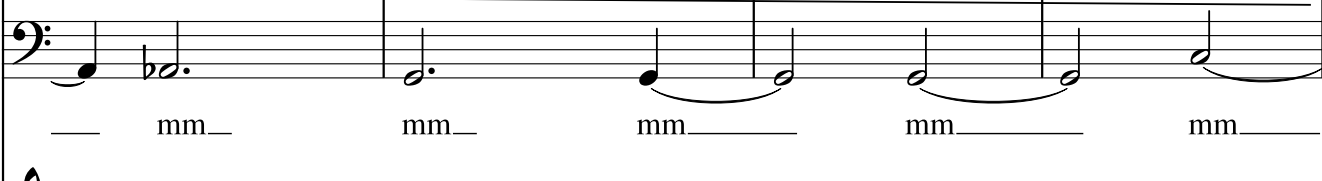
Tu. Be. (none)

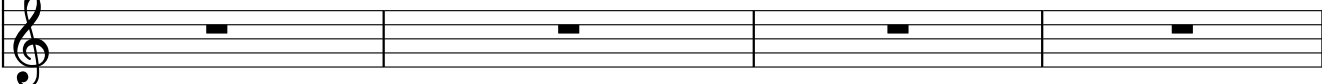
*p*

B. 

A.   
oh oh oh ooh mm

T.   
ooh ooh ooh oh mm

B.   
mm mm mm mm mm

Tu. Be. 

26 Sung *f*

B.   
Un - wear - ied then were Dur-in's folk; Be neath the

A.   
*mf* Oh ah mm

T.   
*mf* Un - wear - ied, Mm Oh

B.   
*mf* Oh ah ooh

Tu. Be. 

B. mountain mus-ic woke:\_\_\_\_\_ The harp-ers harped, the min strels

A. oh\_ ooh ah\_ the mus-ic woke,\_\_\_\_\_

T. 8 ah\_ the mus-ic woke,\_\_\_\_\_ Ah\_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_ Ah\_ ah\_\_\_\_\_

Tu. Be. \_\_\_\_\_

B. sang,\_\_\_\_\_ and at the gates the trump - ets rang. and at the

A. Oh ah\_

T. 8 oh,\_\_\_\_\_ the trump - ets,\_\_\_\_\_

B. Oh\_\_\_\_\_

Tu. Be. \_\_\_\_\_

35

B. *gates the trump - ets rang.*

A. *Oh*

T. *Ooh*

B. *Mm ah Mm*

Tu. Be.

*p*

*p*

*p*

39

B.

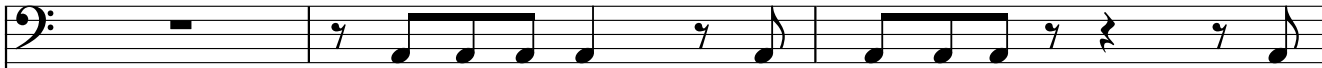
A. *Ooh Oh Ooh oh*

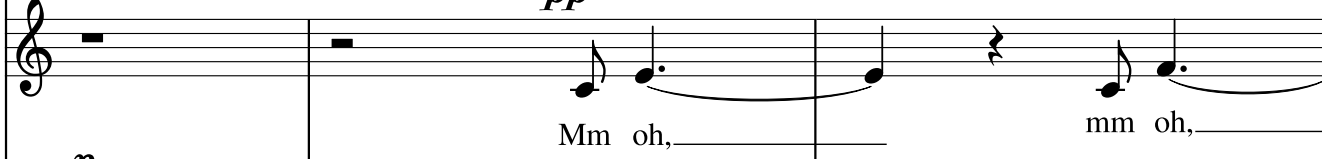
T. *Oh Ooh Oh Ooh oh*

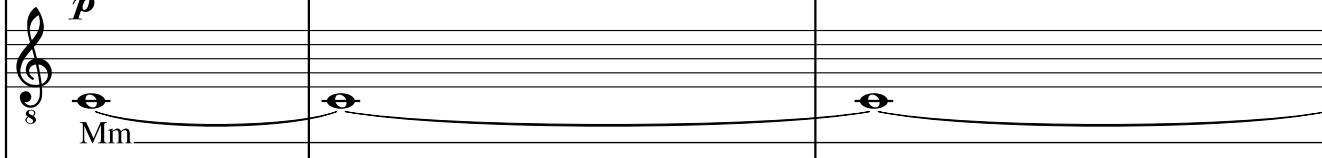
B. *Mm Oh Ooh ooh Oh*

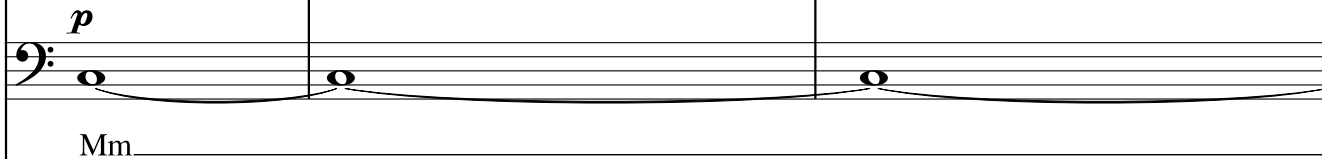
Tu. Be. *p p p*

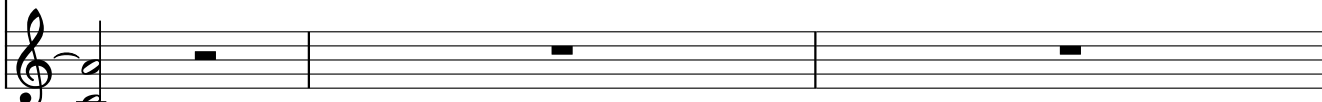
*mf* Spoken


B. 

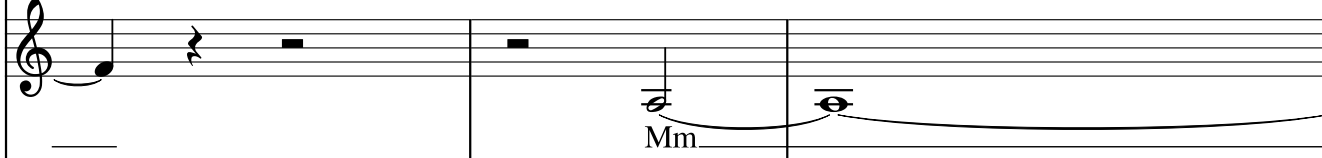
A. 

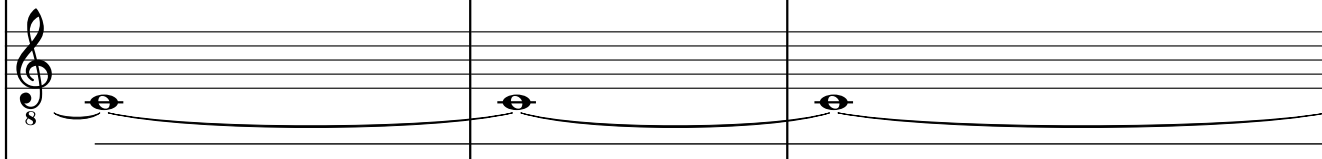
T. 


B. 

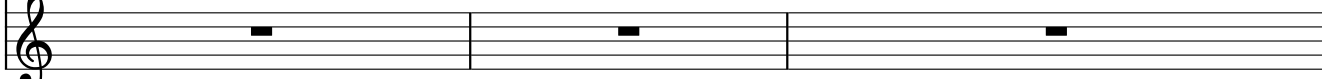
Tu. Be. 


B. 

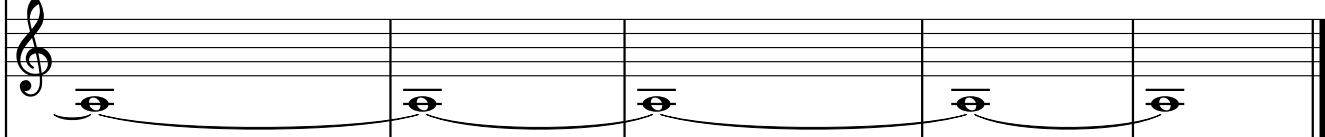
A. 

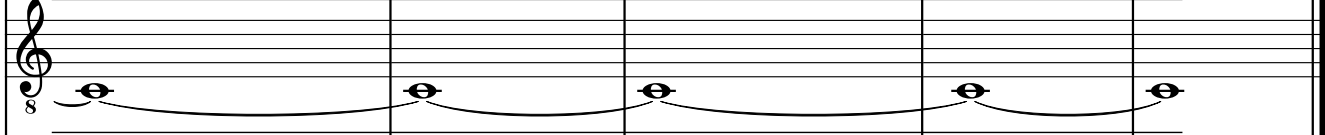
T. 

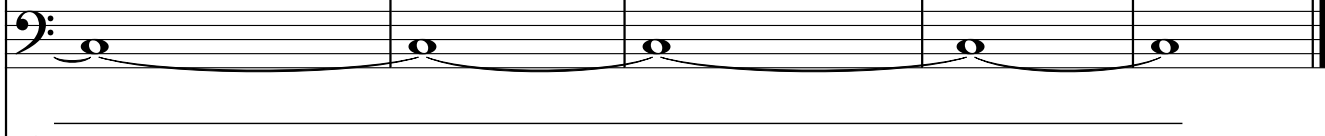
B. 

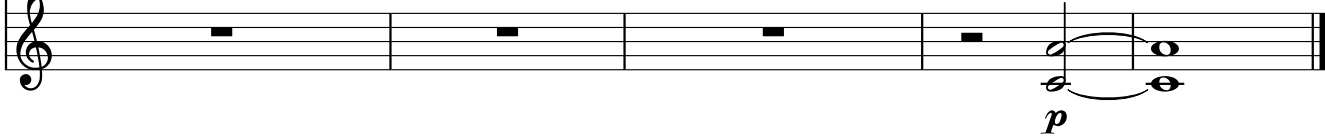
Tu. Be. 

B.   
The dark-ness dwells\_\_ in Dur-in's halls.

A. 

T. 

B. 

Tu. Be.   
*p*

# Githoniel! O, Elbereth

J.R.R. Tolkien

Jessica Spiars

Freely flowing, reverent (♩ = 66)

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

*p* Snow white! *p* O La - dy

*mp* O La - dy clear! \_\_\_\_\_

8

5

S. *mp* clear! Gil - thon - i-el! O El - ber - eth! *mp* O

A. *pp* white! Ah Gil - thon - i-el!

T. *p* Snow white! \_\_\_\_\_

8

10

S. Queen be - yond the West - ern Seas! O li - ght to

A. *pp* Ah

T.

8

13

S. us that wand - er here a - mid the world of wov - en trees! O

A. *p* Gil - thon - i - el! O

T. *p* Ah

17

S. El - ber - eth Clear are thy eyes and

A. El - ber - eth! O El - ber - eth

T. *mp* Gil - thon - i - el! Ah

21

S. bright thy breath! We sing to thee in a far

A. *p* Snow white!

T. *p* Snow white!



25

S. *mp* land\_ Ah\_

A. *mp* in a far\_ land\_ be - yond\_ the Sea. Ah\_

T. *mf* O stars\_ that in the

29

S. Ah\_

A. Ah\_

T. Ah\_

Sun - less\_ Year\_ with shin - ing\_ hand by

32

S. *mf* we\_ see your sil -

A. *mf* in wind - y\_ fields now\_ bright and\_ clear\_

T. her\_ were\_ sown,\_ Ah\_

35

S. ver\_\_ blos - som blown! *f* O El - bereth! Gil-thon - i - el! O

A. Ah *f* O El - bereth! Gil-thon - i - el, Gil-thon - i - el!

T. *mf* Ah El -

40

S. El - bereth! Gil - thon-i - el! *mf* we who dwell

A. Gil - thon-i - el! We still re - mem - ber, we who dwell

T. - ber - eth! Gil - thon-i - el! *mp* Ah

45

S. *mp* Ah

A. *mp* Ah

T. *mf* In this\_\_ far\_\_ land be - neath the\_\_ trees, thy star - light\_\_ on the

49

S. *p* Ah\_\_\_\_ *mf* A! El - ber - eth!\_\_\_\_ *mp* Gil-thon - i - el!\_\_\_\_

A. *mp* Gil - thon - i - el! A! El - ber - eth!\_\_\_\_ *p* Ah\_\_\_\_

T. *mf* West - ern Seas.\_\_\_\_ Gil-thon - i - el!\_\_\_\_

**Solemn, sacred; slowing to end**

54

S. \_\_\_\_\_

A. \_\_\_\_\_ *p* Sil - i-vren pen - na mí - ri - el,\_\_\_\_

T. *pp* Snow\_\_\_\_ white!\_\_\_\_ *p* Sil - i-vren pen - na

58

S. *mp* O men - el a - glar\_\_\_\_ el - en - ath!

A. *mp* O men - el a - glar el - en - ath!

T. *mp* mí - ri - el!\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Budget

- Eden, B. L. *Middle-earth Minstrel: Essays on music in Tolkien*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010: \$26.55
- Snyder, Christopher. *The Making of Middle-earth: A New Look Inside the World of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Sterling, 2013: \$23.96
- Steimel, H., Tolkien, J. R. R., & Schneidewind, F. *Music in Middle-earth*. Zurich: Walking Tree, 2010: \$4.49